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Schools have a major contribution to make in the area of mental health and have a responsibility to develop programs of a positive nature which will provide favorable grounds for the emergence of mentally healthy individuals. Schools cannot prevent all emotional disorders, neither can they correct all those which come to them. Public opinion and the judgments of educators agree that the most significant results of education are the generalized learnings and attitudes that enable a person to attack his life problems more successfully, rather than the specific skills and information he receives. The quality of the school's influence for mental health is determined by the personal characteristics of the teachers. Psychosocial needs of children and positive teacher characteristics are discussed. Implications, including the need for concern toward teacher mental health are discussed. Guidelines for developing a school mental health program are presented. (Author/KJ)

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DISCUSSION PAPERS

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The School's Contribution to Mental Health

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The School's Contribution to Mental Health

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There is little question that emotional disorders and disturbed interpersonal relations have become one of the commanding problems of our time. Emotional disorders affect more people than any other single disease or disability and our environment seems to be producing maladaptive individuals at a faster rate than facilities and personnel to care for them.

Various studies indicate that about ten to twelve percent of the population are so seriously disturbed emotionally that they would benefit from professional treatment. Crime and juvenile delinquency is on the increase with a higher percentage of crime among teenagers. School dropouts continue at a high rate. Studies show that more than half of students who enter college do not remain long enough to earn a degree. Scholastic failure among these students has frequently been found to be associated with apathy, physical symptoms of emotional origin, and other behavior indicative of inadequate adjustment. The data on alcholism, drug addiction, suicides, broken marriages, and crime further document the seriousness of emotional disturbances. Our society has failed in many areas to contribute to positive mental health of its citizens.

Schools have a major contribution to make in the area of mental health and have a responsibility to develop programs of a positive nature which will provide favorable grounds for emergence of mentally healthy individuals. Few people would deny that schools have a greater impact on the lives of more individuals, at a time when it counts the most, than any other social institution. Today the school takes a third or more of the student's waking hours; changed laws and customs make almost every youth attend until nearly an adult, and increasing urbanization makes the school assume many duties formerly carried by the home. Realization of the fact that a great majority of those now classified as mentally disturbed are, or were at one time in school, is a sobering thought for educators.

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Schools cannot prevent all emotional disorders, neither can they correct all those which come to them. Emotional disorders, generally, are produced by many interwoven cultural and social forces which cannot be separated. However, administrators and school staff should be conscious of the immensity of the problem of mental and emotional illness and aware of the far-reaching effect which the school environment can have in promoting the nation's mental health.

Bolman and Westman (1967) states the school is the major institution through which children receive assessment and is the appropriate place to indentify children showing recognizable disturbance. Kaplan (1959) shows the academic success achieved by a child, his relationships with other children and with his teachers, and the total environment of the school are potent forces in affecting emotional growth and adjustments.

Public opinion and the judgments of educators agree that the most significant results of education are the generalized learnings and attitudes that enable a person to attack his life problems more successfully, rather than the specific skills and bits of information that he acquires. Since early life experiences are so important for healthy development of personality the school system should include a program for the promotion of healthy, emotional development as a part of the regular curriculum. Baruch (1956) expresses this idea by saying that the schools cannot ignore their responsibility for aiding students in the solution of personal problems, because mental health is far more fundamental than any of the traditional three R's. Rogers (1967) states the goal of education must be to develop a society in which people can live more comfortable with change than with rigidity and that a way must be found to develop a climate conducive to personal growth in which the creative capacities of administrators, teachers and students are nourished and expressed rather than stifled. Stoops and Marks (1965) add that school experiences should be planned deliberately to help children meet their individual needs of society. They note that sensitivities that begin in childhood are deepened and expanded throughout life. Caplan (1961) emphasizes that schools often fail to contribute to positive mental health. He concludes that youngsters do not simply drop out of school, but are squeezed out by a curriculum which they cannot measure up to, and by social forces which they cannot comprehend.

The quality of the school's influence for mental health is determined in no small measure by the personal characteristics of its teachers. A teacher who is secure, warm, accepting and genuinely perceptive of students as persons may have a most favorable influence upon them, even in spite of other shortcomings as an educator. On the unfortunate side, teachers whose personalities evoke anxious or defensive behavior in pupils can wreck the best-planned curricular provisions for mental health.

Mental health studies of teachers reveal that most teachers are well-adjusted men and women who exert a wholesome influence on the personality development of children. However, there are teachers who in their daily contact with children are doing more damage to the lives of the students. Many teachers are not fit by training or personality to guide the educational activities of children. Teachers are people and are subject to the same psychological hazards as children and other adults. They are often unable to achieve their goals in their profession or personal life and develop their own frustrations and conflicts. Many fail to adjust to the school routine and, in time, they look upon teaching as drudgery and become irritable, unsympathetic, over-emotional, and thereby become a danger to pupil adjustment.

An early study by Townsend (1933) shows that the chances are seven to one that a child will be under the influence of at least two unstable, neurotic, or psychopathic teachers during the course of his twelve years in school. Fenton (1943) studied maladjusted teachers in the California school and discovered teachers who had little interest in children, who were mean, sarcastic, moody, and irritable. Others were so dependent on the principal that they would run to him several times a day for assurance. Research studies of the extent of maladjustment among teachers is inadequate, but a study of unhappiness among teachers was secured through a nationwide survey by the National Education Association in 1957. Out of 5, 602 teachers it was found that 15 percent were so unhappy in their work that if given the opportunity to start over, they would not choose teaching as a career. Symonds (1942) conducted studies on personality problems of teachers and concluded that many teachers have strong inferiority feelings and are attracted to teaching

because they can work with children who must, of necessity, be inferior to themselves. Other teachers, according to Symonds, need to be aggressive and dominant as a compensation for what they have suffered at the hands of others; and they see in teaching socially approved opportunities for expressing aggressive and sadistic trends which would otherwise have to be repressed.

On the basis of the studies that have been made it has been concluded that from 27-43 percent of teachers are unhappy, nervous, dissatisfied, and working under considerable strain. The seriousness with which this situation is viewed by educators is expressed by the American Association of School Administrators in this statement:

> The emotionally unstable teacher exerts such a detrimental influence on children that she should not be allowed to remain in the classroom. The teacher with an uncontrollable temper, or one severely depressed, markedly prejudiced, flagrantly intolerant, bitingly sarcastic, or habitually scolding may endanger the emotional health of pupils as seriously as one with tuberculosis or some other communicable disease endangers their physical health. Such teachers need help, but while they are being helped they should be out of their classrooms so their pupils may be freed from the psychic injury and repression and fear which their presence creates.

Since the influence on the mental health of children depends largely upon the relationships established between teachers and students in the classroom it is well to consider the psychosocial needs of children and the teacher characteristics which make a positive contribution to these needs.

Educators are in general agreement that there are three groups of psychosocial needs which are vital to a child's emotional well being. These are: 1) the need for interpersonal satisfaction, 2) the need for group status, and 3) the need for self-development. Many studies have been conducted in an effort to determine the best classroom atmosphere for meeting these needs. Most of these studies have converged to agree with the three characteristics which Rogers (1958) and Truax (1961) assert to be essential in any helping relationship. The three characteristics are: 1) Unconditional Positive Regard or warmth which is

caring for a student in a nonpossessive way, as a person with potentialities; 2) Empathy which means sensing the student's inner world of private personal meanings; and 3) Genuineness which involves coming into a direct personal encounter with the student, meeting him on a person-to-person basis.

Breckenridge and Vincent (1965) verifies the significance of the teacher and the teacher-pupil relationship in the following:

> A pupil's learning is, in large measure, a function of the kind of teaching to which he is exposed... Doubtless if one were to search for the single most important factor in the teacher-child relationship, one would find that friendliness stands out in simple, direct forcefulness... teachers are, as a whole, far more friendly than they used to be, not only because there is a freer conception of education as a whole, but also because of a recognition of the importance of a good teacher-pupil relationship to the child's social and emotional development.

Elshree and McNally (1959) assert the importance of good interpersonal relationships between teacher and pupil:

> A great deal of the learning which takes place in the school comes through interpersonal relationships. Either directly or indirectly much of a pupil's behavior and knowledge springs from the way his teachers and associates behave and act.

Bowers and Soar (1962) concluded from results of teachers' Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and their classroom performance that:

> Skillful interaction with pupils requires on the part of the teacher (1) responsibility, (2) depth of affective relationship, (3) well enough adjusted that much of her energy is not drained off in dealing with her own intrapersonal tensions, and (4) ability to perceive herself and others clearly and represent herself honestly in communication with others. A teacher must, in short, care. Perhaps what this reduces to is that a teacher must be able to use her "self" openly, clearly, and honestly in her interactions with students.

Lippell (1965) expresses the idea of genuineness on the part of the teacher:

> Teachers must be authentic adults with feelings clearly visible. If we adopt the role of saint, our actions will too often defy our words. If genuine feelings of goodwill predominate in the classroom, teachers' momentary displeasures and angry feelings will not distort their good intentions.

Brown (1961) found significant relationships between categories of teacher behavior at the third grade level:

> Teachers who were inclined to use more praise were likely not to be as directive nor use as much reproof in their teaching. Teachers whose behavior was inclined more toward the punitive seemed to use relatively little praise and were more directive.

Thelen (1961) supports the point of view that the generalized condition of the classroom is important:

> The learning outcome depends a good deal on the spirit in which the ritual is followed. The spirit can be enthusiastic, warm, incisive--or it can be indifferent, hostile or meandering. It is probable that the learning is determined by the spirit rather than the ritual. That is, the enthusiastic incisive teacher would get better results than the other kind no matter what procedures they used.

Morgan (1960) agrees with Thelen about the relative importance of warmth:

> Research tells us that this urge (inborn drive to become more of himself, to become a fuller self) can be nurtured by providing warm, supporting, and valuing relationship. Research in education, psychology and psychiatry is demonstrating very clearly that effective measures can be taken to neutralize and offset any interfering factors. These measures include fully accepting the child, modifying our expectations of him, recovering any threat he may feel in the classroom.

Johnson (1962), a sixth grade teacher, adds his experimental knowledge to the discussion of the classroom climate:

> The teacher should not try to assume the role of a stern and impersonal sentinel in the classroom but should strive instead to become the friend and trusted confidant that many lonely youngsters long for so deeply and need so desperately. I am only one of the group of classroom teachers who is on the scene daily and who knows from firsthand experience that love, along with faith, understanding, and perseverance can accomplish wonders.

The National Education Association's Journal stated:

> In dealing with children there is no room for pretense. The teacher must be honest with himself as well as his children. He must use his authority wisely, grant approval only when it is deserved, and then in such a way that it furthers the child's next efforts toward learning.

Combs and Soper (1963) investigated "good" and "bad" teachers' concepts of the ideal helping relationship and drew this conclusion:

> It is not enough to help students see more clearly what good helping relationships are like. Apparently, they know already. There is a great difference between "knowing" and "behaving" and the successful teachers' colleges cannot be content with producing mere changes in "knowing"... apparently, helping relationships are not markedly different wherever they are found. This means that training programs for teachers, counselors, psychotherapists, social workers, nurses, and all other helping professions are engaged in the same basic process.

Kingsley (1966), a supervisor of student teachers, emphasizes the importance of relationships at the teacher training level:

> The main ways in which a supervisor "helps" his student is by setting an example of what a real teacher is in all his relationships with the student is paramount. The supervisor needs to do the kinds of things which help establish a warm, relaxed atmosphere within which the student can operate.

Henderson (1966) relates the importance of the principal and the role which he must play:

> In order to develop a warm, friendly, acceptant, facilitating relationship with children, the principal must see himself as a helping person. The development of rapport with children begins with a sincere desire in them and a desire to help them become more adequate.

Many studies have attempted to identify qualities which distinguish good teachers. Rummell (1948), commenting on qualities of good teachers, notes that in all phases of their work the good teacher takes the avenue marked "Human Relations". Gowan (1957) notes that good teachers evince a genuine love for children and for the interpersonal relations which result in the growth and development of children socially and emotionally. Anderson (1945) conducted studies which were consistent in showing that dominative behavior on the part of a teacher tends to arouse similar behavior among pupils, and likewise, integrative or "working together" type of behavior tends to produce corresponding behavior among pupils. Frost (1966) relates that teachers who can offer any observable gains for the disadvantaged are those teachers who have special qualities of empathy, sensitivity, and insight. Fox, Lippitt, and Schmuck (1964) report the following findings:

> A pupil's dissatisfaction with his teacher is accompanied by dissatisfaction for himself (low self-esteem)... Pupils who have poor relationships with their teachers have more negative attitudes toward school, as well as a high level of dissatisfaction with the teacher.

Schmuck and Van Egmond (1965) found that pupils with more compatible relations with teachers perform at a higher level academically than those with less compatible relations.

In a review of current research Hamachek (1969) concluded that effective teachers appear to be those who are, shall we say, "human" in the fullest sense of the word. They have a sense of humor, are fair, empathetic, more democratic than autocratic, and apparently are more able to relate easily and naturally to students on either a one-to-one or a group basis.

Few educators would deny the importance of good teacher-pupil relationships and their contribution to positive mental health of the nation. The mental health of children depends largely upon the relationships established between teachers and students in the classroom and it is here in the area of interpersonal relationships that teachers can make their greatest contribution.

Implications

Teachers, like students, need to be recognized as persons, and to have someone with whom they can discuss their feelings. Schools should have various kinds of therapeutic services available for pupils, but it is a mistake to provide such services for pupils and not for teachers. Teachers have their needs the same as other members of society and unless these needs are met through a comprehensive mental health program the frustrations of the teacher will be passed on to the students.

Teacher training institutions shouls provide training in interpersonal skills and the teaching profession should set standards to weed out those entering the profession who are more harmful than helpful.

The school plant is an important contributor to mental health in the school system. The kind of building, the type of equipment, and the maintenance and custodial system all aid in promoting and maintaining the emotional health of both students and staff.

Every school child is directly or indirectly affected in his school progress and emotional outlook by a hiearchy of influences in which he is forced to participate but has no control. These influences in the school are determined by the Board of Education, administrative staff, teachers and other school personnel. An ongoing evaluation of themselves and the school system should be instituted to determine if the school is effectively meeting the needs of students and promoting positive mental health.

The school should offer educational opportunities to parents, teachers and other school staff, as well as students, and keep facilities open for use by the community.

Lastly, the school must involve the student more positively and honestly in what school is all about. High school students should participate in governing the school and share responsibilities as a community citizen. Students should not be required or expected to tolerate a school culture which fails to provide the human relationships essential for wholesome, meaningful and productive growth.

Guidelines
for
Developing a School Mental Health Program

The aims of education and of mental health are basically the same, namely the development of persons who can live effective and satisfactory lives in society. Schools have two basic responsibilities for mental health. One task is to rid itself of practices that contribute to pupil maladjustment and the other is to insure that education will be a positive and constructive influence in the life of every teacher.

Positive mental health practices should be emphasized in all school activities but should also be taught in specific courses designed to teach basic values and concepts. This training should begin in elementary school and continue through college.

Steps In Development

I. Orient school board members as to good mental health practices in schools. This can be accomplished by utilizing professional personnel or others in the community who recognize and demonstrate effective mental health practices. Seminars developed through the National and State School Board Associations could make great contribution in this field.

II. Teacher training institutions should develop specific courses designed to emphasize good human relations and teach interpersonal skills.

III. State certification for school administrators should require at least twelve in specific courses designed to teach and foster good human relations and interpersonal relationships.

IV. Teachers should receive specific training designed to enhance their ability to communicate empathy, warmth and genuineness.

V. Continuous in-service training programs emphasizing interpersonal skills should be developed for all staff, including custodians, cooks, bus drivers, teacher aides and others.

VI. A competent school psychologist should be employed to work with the school staff.

VII. Studies should be made to determine the extent of emotional problems in the school and follow-up studies to determine what happens to students in the education process.

VIII. A school mental health committe should be organized. Member should consist of students, staff, and lay personnel. This committe should be active and its function would be advisory.

IX. Building and grounds should be designed and maintained in a manner that would contribute to positive mental health.

X. Planning for school mental health should be on a broad base involving all major community leaders and organizations.

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